

## I. Introduction

Hillcrest School is a public K-8 school located in the Upper Rockridge neighborhood of Oakland and is part of the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). OUSD has historically used small, neighborhood schools as the model for its educational program, and Hillcrest is among the smallest physical campuses in the district. Since 2003, Hillcrest has experienced an increase in enrollment from within the area that the OUSD has defined as the school's attendance area.

In January 2007, a record number of prospective kindergarteners—more than 60—applied to Hillcrest for the 2007-2008 school year. Just one year prior to this, Hillcrest had been forced to find space to double its kindergarten facilities (from one classroom to two) to accommodate two full-day kindergarten classes, in keeping with a district-wide mandate. Previously two time-staggered half-day classes had shared space in a single classroom. Under the overlapping guidelines of the California Department of Education's Class Size Reduction (CSR) program and the Teacher Contract Limit agreement of 2006 (between the OUSD and the Oakland Education Association, the teachers' union), Hillcrest was bound to limit kindergarten enrollment for the 2007-2008 school year to 40 students. The demand for kindergarten spaces at Hillcrest for 2007-2008, however, significantly exceeded this limit.

The demand for kindergarten spaces also exceeded the OUSD's demographic predictions. The district had not foreseen the extraordinary number of applicants at Hillcrest, and, therefore, had not forewarned prospective incoming families that their child might not be granted a space. In fact, the OUSD enrollment materials for fall 2007 did not address how enrollment decisions are prioritized *when a school experiences demand that significantly exceeds available space*. Underlying the enrollment prioritization policy in place at the time was an implicit assumption that all students in a given attendance area could be accommodated at their local school; the policy was designed to govern how students were assigned priority in transferring out of their own attendance-area schools. This meant that families applying to Hillcrest were at a disadvantage in terms of participating in the OUSD Options program, which allows families to list second- and third-choice schools, and which gives priority to the requests of children seeking to transfer out of what the district calls "program improvement schools." With no indication that their children might not be admitted to Hillcrest, many of the families expecting to enroll a child at Hillcrest in 2007-2008 did not list any alternate school choice on their applications.

When the OUSD received the large number of kindergarten applications, it began allotting spaces by first admitting any applicant living in the Hillcrest attendance area who had one or more siblings already enrolled at Hillcrest. It then conducted a lottery by random computer assignment to allot slots to the remaining attendance-area applicants. Once 40 children had been selected to attend Hillcrest, the remaining children in the applicant pool were then assigned to either of two other Rockridge-area schools, Chabot Elementary or Kaiser Elementary. Chabot and Kaiser are each located less than two miles from Hillcrest (1.4 and 1.6 miles away, respectively) and are widely regarded as high-performing schools, with very high standardized test scores and full enrichment programs. Assigning children to these two excellent—but K-5, rather than K-8—nearby schools was a deliberate effort on the part of the

district to mitigate the disappointment of the redirected families at not having been allotted a slot at the school they had fully expected their child could attend.

In spite of these efforts by the OUSD, families whose children were redirected regarded the selection process as haphazard, arbitrary, and opaque. Frustration among these families grew, and was communicated to the district. In response, the OUSD suggested the formation of a committee to address the *immediate* enrollment situation for the 2007-2008 school year. This hastily-constituted, temporary committee (which was assembled, from a pool of volunteers, by the school principal in conjunction with the PTA president) recommended—and OUSD agreed—that *based on the lack of notice to these families regarding the potential for redirection*, any family who had applied to Hillcrest during the enrollment period and who had filed an appeal to seek enrollment at Hillcrest should be permitted to enter the school.

As a result, more than 60 children were admitted to the 2007-2008 kindergarten class. Of these, 52 ultimately enrolled and are currently attending Hillcrest. Accommodating a class of 52 rather than 40 children necessitated the hiring of an additional teacher; the conversion of a shared, multipurpose enrichment-class room into a designated K-1 classroom; the creation of a combination K-1 class in addition to the two planned-for kindergarten classes; restriction of afterschool programs due to space limitations; and the elimination of kindergarten Spanish. The newly formed K-1 class is housed in a portable. The space is undersized by the terms of the California Code of Regulations (CCR) and does not meet that code's requirement that kindergarten classrooms have running water. The small size and lack of running water limit the teacher's ability to engage the class in numerous projects.<sup>1</sup> The portable is also in violation of the CCR and the California Department of Education (CDE) standard requiring that kindergarten classrooms have their own restrooms.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, when combined with the overenrollment of the previous two years' kindergarten classes, the overenrollment of the 2007-2008 kindergarten class caused substantial changes at Hillcrest, including the loss of enrichment offerings and other school attributes that incoming and existing parents had expected for their children. Within the lower grades, Hillcrest is now definitively overcrowded.

During the spring of 2007, the entire (incoming and already-enrolled) Hillcrest community sensed a crisis in the making if a similarly large number of kindergarteners were to seek entry to Hillcrest in the fall of 2008, 2009, and beyond. Hillcrest is simply too small. The community also wished to create a fair and transparent enrollment process for the benefit of prospective parents, and to form recommendations that would allow the school to maintain the quality of education that has made Hillcrest so attractive to applicants in the first place.

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1 CCR, Title 5 Section 14030(2)(A) states that a permanent kindergarten classroom should not be less than 1,350 square feet and should include self-contained restrooms as well as wet and dry, storage, and teacher preparation areas. The portable measures approximately 781 square feet. Hillcrest's other two K classrooms measure approximately 1107 and 900 square feet, respectively. [www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cs/k3/recommend.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cs/k3/recommend.asp)

2 California Department of Education, "K-12 Toilet Requirement Summary," [www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/toiletrequire.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/toiletrequire.asp)

In order to avoid repeating the situation that had occurred with 2007-2008 enrollment, the School Site Council (SSC), an elected body comprised of members of the teaching faculty, school administrators, and current Hillcrest parents, recommended that a longer-term committee be formed to address the enrollment situation for 2008-2009 and beyond. The Hillcrest Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) was therefore formed in May 2007. The process of the committee's formation and of developing this report is described in more detail in Sections III and IV, below.

Mindful of the need not to repeat the confusion and frustration experienced by Hillcrest's 2007 entering class (and, presumably, entering classes at other Oakland schools), OUSD administrators are currently working on an enrollment plan for all OUSD schools, supported by the work of an OUSD staff demographer and other district administrators. The recommendations of the LRPC constitute one of the inputs the OUSD will present on the topic of district-wide enrollment to the city's state-appointed district administrator and the Oakland Board of Education, OUSD's governing board. OUSD staff have indicated to the LRPC their desire to receive the LRPC's recommendations by October 2007 in order to a) take them into account in preparing their own presentation to the board and b) to have a timely, positive impact on the families of students due to begin kindergarten in fall 2008.

The LRPC was constituted with the support of the Hillcrest teaching staff and principal, as well as the encouragement of district administrators and Hillcrest's area School Board representative, Kerry Hamill. The LRPC was charged with examining likely enrollment for fall 2008 and later years, and with preserving the nature and quality of Hillcrest education. OUSD is encountering enrollment challenges similar to Hillcrest's in many schools east of the 580 freeway ("Hills" schools) and in multiple high-performing, small schools throughout East Oakland. Enrollment pressures at Hillcrest and these other schools are emblematic of the best "problem" possible: a flight *back* to public schools.

## **II. Background of Hillcrest School and Community**

The LRPC believes it may be helpful to the reader to understand how Hillcrest School arrived at its current configuration. Hillcrest opened its doors in 1951, and initially operated as a K-5 school. Some years later, the OUSD shifted its educational model for school divisions by grade, and Hillcrest—following the district’s new mandate—became a K-6 school.

Hillcrest has faced overcrowding several times during its history. The school’s original building, which contains seven of its current classrooms, was designed to accommodate one class each for grades K through 5 (occupying six rooms) and a school library (occupying the seventh). When the school moved to a K-6 model, the library was moved into a portable added on the playground, so that the main building’s seventh room could become a dedicated classroom. Over the years, as the school population continued to grow and lower grade bands were split into two classes each, two more portable classrooms were added, one on what is now the middle-school patio and the other on the playground.

The Oakland Hills Fire of 1991 devastated the Hillcrest neighborhood. Although the school was unscathed, many Hillcrest families lost their homes. Some families subsequently relocated outside the neighborhood during the prolonged reconstruction process; others moved away permanently. These population shifts prompted enrollment concerns at Hillcrest. The community had reason to suspect that if school enrollment dropped too low, OUSD would view the school as unviable and would close it.

During this era, the predominant trend among more affluent families living in the Oakland Hills was to pull their children out of the Oakland public schools after sixth grade, either by paying for private middle school or simply moving out of Oakland altogether (in favor of other communities with what were perceived to be better public middle and high schools than Oakland’s). The Hillcrest community had an idea: Expand Hillcrest’s educational model to include a middle school, thereby addressing both the problem of low enrollment and the lack of desirable local public middle-school options.

In concert with other small Oakland public schools, members of the Hillcrest community began exploring the concept of transitioning to a K-8 model. After a significant investment of time and energy, the change was approved—first by the greater Hillcrest community, and then by the Oakland School Board. In 1994, another portable was added on the playground to accommodate the school’s first seventh grade class. The middle school quickly became an integral part of the school, and now routinely achieves the highest standardized test scores of any middle school in the OUSD. In sum, while it is in this sense rare in the OUSD, Hillcrest has flourished for more than a decade as a cohesive K-8 unit.

In 2002, members of the Hillcrest Community formed the Hillcrest Fund and undertook the Great Expectations Campaign, a fundraising effort dedicated to the improvement of the school’s physical plant. As noted, the school was at that time operating with numerous portables that were beyond their serviceable years and in desperate need of replacement. The Great Expectations Campaign was predicated on a partnership with the OUSD that would combine the campaign’s privately raised funds with monies from OUSD bond revenues, which had been

approved by voters over several preceding years. The three-year-long Great Expectations Campaign raised \$1.2 million from the greater Hillcrest community, including then-current school families, former and future families, neighbors, and businesses. A portion of the \$1.2 million was raised, through the efforts of Hillcrest community members, from local non-profit organizations, foundation donors, and state granting agencies. This money was combined with OUSD funds and a grant from the State's Office of Public School Construction to underwrite improvements in Hillcrest's physical plant in three areas: construction of a new building; removal of the outmoded portables; and creation of a playground area of approximately 6,000 square feet.

The new building—which currently houses the school's library, a computer lab, a science lab, one second grade class, fourth grade, fifth grade, and two combined classes of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders—was substantially completed in 2006. (Detail work continued on into 2007.) The portables located on the playground were removed from the campus at that time. By the time the new building was occupied in 2006, Hillcrest had a school population of just under 300 students.

From 1993 to 2000, Hillcrest's annual kindergarten enrollment ranged from a one-time low of 32 (in 1994) to a one-time high of 43 (in 1995). The majority of incoming classes during those years were made up of 37 or fewer students. With the exception of one year (2004) since then, however, the number of families who wanted their kindergarten-age children to enter Hillcrest has exceeded the ideal of 40 students (two classes of 20 children each). In the past three years, the rate of overenrollment has risen precipitously; the most recent kindergarten classes numbered 48, 50, and 52 students respectively in 2005, 2006, and 2007.

Simultaneously, attrition has been falling as children progressed through the grades and more stayed on through middle school. As a result of this shift in retention patterns, the middle school has experienced increased class sizes while simultaneously being strained spatially by the desire to increase academic and enrichment offerings (such as 8th-grade geometry, an expanded sports program, foreign languages, and music).

The twin trends of increased enrollment and decreased attrition culminated in 2007 with the events discussed above. These events, in turn, led to the formation of the LRPC.

### III. Selection of Members

At the urging of OUSD representatives, and in concert with the elected School Site Council (SSC), the short-term Enrollment Planning Committee was reconstituted as the Long Range Planning Committee. The SSC, with input from the PTA, developed a transparent selection process that included delineating the overall Hillcrest community into caucus groups, and instructing caucuses to elect a predetermined number of representatives to the LRPC. The PTA alerted the Hillcrest community—including potential parents and school neighbors—that they were invited to elect representatives based on student age (grade band) and other criteria. Potential candidates, who either self-selected or were nominated by other members of the community, submitted statements of intent that were distributed to their respective caucuses. Subsequently, caucus meetings were held at which candidates spoke directly with caucus members. Votes were then cast via a combination of paper and email ballots.

The elected representatives include three parents whose children are slated to be part of the “Entering Class of 2008” (i.e., the graduating class of 2015) and younger; one parent whose child is a member of the current Hillcrest kindergarten class; two parents representing grades 1 through 3; two parents representing grades 4 and 5; two parents representing grades 6 through 8; one at-large (and non-parent) member of the community; the school principal; one OUSD representative; one representative from the Hillcrest teaching staff (a floating slot); one representative of the PTA Board (which raises and manages the funds for the many programs that supplement Hillcrest education and help make the school special); and one representative from the SSC (which deals with discretionary district-provided monies, academic and social goals, and discipline). All groups except SSC, teachers, and the community representative formed caucuses to select their members and to contribute to the process. The individuals representing specific constituencies are:

Name	Representing
Simon Cawley, Thomas DaSilva, Sally Ann Friedman	2008 and Later Prospective Kindergarten
Darcy Brown-Martin	2007-2008 Kindergarten
Neal Finkelstein, Steven Raphael	2007-2008 Grades 1, 2, & 3
Eric Abrams, Mary Ann Piette	2007-2008 Grades 4 & 5
Lovella Barney, Jose Blackorby	2007-2008 Grades 6, 7, & 8
Barbara Buswell, Ann Henderson, and Claudia Staniford (alternating)	Hillcrest Teacher
Beverly Rothenberg	Hillcrest Principal
Denise Saddler	Oakland Unified School District
Shannon Broome	PTA Board
Charles Pelton	School Site Council
Elsie Mallonee	Non-parent Hillcrest Community Member

## **IV. Process for Deliberation and Report Preparation**

The LRPC process involved a series of full committee meetings, interim subcommittee meetings, and outreach to the greater community. At the outset, the LRPC set out to define the scope of the problem. Specifically, while there was clearly an issue of demand (more than 60 potential incoming kindergarteners for 2007-2008) exceeding supply (40 available spaces), the scope of the problem for future years, i.e., the permanence of the demand, remained in question. Another key question identified early on in the deliberations was, “What is the right overall number of students for Hillcrest, given the limited size of the physical space?” After initial discussions, LRPC members agreed that Hillcrest’s situation could not be unique and that there were likely best practices available regarding how communication is handled with parents of prospective students, as well as how space is rationed when there is a greater demand than there are spaces available for students (at any grade) in a school.

To help bound the scope of the issue and develop a basis for potential recommended solutions, the LRPC formed three subcommittees: Demand, Supply, and Best Practices. The members of the LRPC each volunteered for one of the subcommittees and an effort was made to ensure an even distribution of the representatives of different stakeholder groups across the three subcommittees. Topics identified below as not being in scope are areas where the LRPC sees an opportunity for valuable additional research, but which the committee did not have sufficient time or resources to evaluate comprehensively during this period.

### **Demand Subcommittee**

Members: Shannon Broome, Simon Cawley, Sally Ann Friedman, Steven Raphael

In scope:

- Determine the expected number of students who will seek to enroll in kindergarten at Hillcrest in the next several years.
- Determine the intentions of current school families with regards to their children remaining at Hillcrest.
- If families expect their children to leave before eighth grade, determine when that departure would most likely occur.

Not in scope:

- Determine the expected number of students who will seek to enroll in grades other than kindergarten at Hillcrest in the next several years.

### **Supply Subcommittee**

Members: Lovella Barney, Darcy Brown-Martin, Neal Finkelstein, Elsie Mallonee, Mary Ann Piette

In scope:

- Taking into consideration the quality of education provided, define existing and potential space/facility utilization.
- Evaluate the feasibility of the near-term provision of additional capacity at the current Hillcrest site.
- Define an optimal school population.

Not in scope:

- Evaluate the feasibility of the provision of additional capacity at sites other than Hillcrest.
- Evaluate the feasibility of increasing capacity through the implementation of a year-round school schedule.

## **Best Practices Subcommittee (Communication, Enrollment Management, and Quality of Education)**

Members: Eric Abrams, Jose Blackorby, Tom DaSilva, Charles Pelton

In scope:

- Examine other districts' communications and policies for communication to incoming K families about enrollment processes and the potential for being diverted to other schools.
- Examine other districts' management of enrollment issues at impacted schools.
- Examine pros and cons of K-8 learning environments.

The subcommittees undertook their assigned tasks throughout June, July, and August of 2007. During this time, the Demand Subcommittee conducted two surveys to assess the intentions of current Hillcrest families with regard to how long they expected to stay at Hillcrest and to assess expected demand in coming years. The Supply Subcommittee evaluated the existing classroom and outdoor space at the school and considered how classroom loading can affect the quality of education. The Best Practices Subcommittee a) explored how other districts have conducted redistricting and handled communications about enrollment policies, particularly when a school is overenrolled, b) researched what other approaches are used to solve overcrowding problems, and c) discussed with the OUSD the potential for adjusting attendance-area boundaries for the 2008-2009 school year.

The LRPC met bi-weekly to discuss subcommittee findings and define next steps. In late August and early September, the LRPC began discussing potential recommendations and refining the potential outcomes of its report. LRPC members met with their respective caucuses in June, July, and late September<sup>3</sup> to provide information to the community on LRPC findings and to gather input for further refinement of a set of recommendations to address the enrollment challenges. Flyers were posted throughout the school neighborhood—and pre-K reps sent word about the meeting through a high-traffic pre-K parent email group—to ensure that the general pre-K community would be informed and would have the opportunity to attend caucus meetings. A draft report was provided to the entire Hillcrest community prior to the September caucus meetings, which served as a forum for community-wide discussion of the LRPC report.

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3 For details on caucus attendance at the meetings held after the roll-out of the draft version of this report, see Appendix H.

## V. Findings and Recommendations

Each of the LRPC subcommittees—Demand, Supply, and Best Practices—gathered information within the scope of their assignments. Based on the information gathered, each subcommittee made findings regarding the current and expected outlook at Hillcrest; and based on these findings, each subcommittee contributed to the LRPC’s overall recommendations (which are restated below. Findings and recommendations of the individual subcommittees were also supported by the LRPC.

*Whereas*, the demand for student spaces at Hillcrest school exceeds the supply—given the size of Hillcrest’s physical plant and the effects of changing neighborhood demographics and enrollment patterns—and in support of the principles stated above, we, the Long Range Planning Committee of Hillcrest School, put forth the following prioritized recommendations to affect enrollment for fall 2008 and beyond:

**Recommendation 1:** To ensure quality public education in a non-crowded environment, we recommend that the OUSD institute an enrollment plan at Hillcrest that eventually allows the total campus population to a) stabilize at a number that fits the size of the available physical plant and b) meets each grade level’s needs with regard to class size. (As discussed in the Supply Subcommittee findings, utilization of the current physical plant in a manner that is the same or similar to its current use suggests a target population of approximately 310 students).<sup>4</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** To promote an enrollment process that provides certainty to families, we recommend that the Hillcrest attendance-area boundaries be adjusted to more accurately match the expected number of applicants with the number of spaces available. (The committee recognizes that this will necessitate the simultaneous adjustment of the attendance-area boundaries of other nearby schools.)

**Recommendation 3:** In addition to Recommendation Number 2, boundary adjustment, we recommend that the OUSD examine the feasibility of constructing or converting an existing site in the “Hills” community to accommodate the burgeoning number of students seeking enrollment in schools such as Chabot, Montclair, Thornhill, Redwood Heights, and Joaquin Miller.

**Recommendation 4:** We recommend that the OUSD conduct a feasibility study of the potential for implementing a multi-track year-round schedule to determine if doing so could increase capacity enough to accommodate demand, and also to determine the other effects (both positive and negative) of a year-round schedule.

**Recommendation 5:** To address the current gap in OUSD written policies regarding the placement of children who are involuntarily redirected from their attendance-area school, we recommend that any family whose child is involuntarily redirected from their

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4 For a detailed discussion of how this number was derived, please see Section V-B., Findings and Recommendations, Results of the Supply Subcommittee, Table S-2 and section f., “Optimal Student Population for Hillcrest.”

attendance-area school be given the highest priority to attend the alternate schools they identify on their Options application form, consistent with the current proposed policy for the Alameda Unified School District.<sup>5</sup>

**Recommendation 6:** Consistent with OUSD Board Policy 0420.5<sup>6</sup> (regarding vesting school staff with decision-making power over matters that affect student learning), we recommend that the Hillcrest principal be given authority to determine whether there is room to admit students to grades other than kindergarten, taking into account the planned-for attrition required to prevent overcrowding. Should the principal determine that there is room for additional students in a grade band, we recommend that OUSD utilize a transparent, open, and traceable process to determine which particular student or students are admitted.

**Recommendation 7:** To offset the extremely large kindergarten classes admitted in the past three years, the size of upcoming kindergarten classes will need to be curtailed—perhaps substantially—relative to the steady-state school population, consistent with the models run by the Supply Subcommittee.<sup>7</sup>

**Recommendation 8:** The process for determining which, if any, children are involuntarily redirected to another school should be transparent, traceable, and open, and should be fully described in writing and published on the OUSD website’s enrollment page before the beginning of the open enrollment period. The website should also include information on the number of intradistrict transfers accepted by each school in the previous school year(s).

Furthermore, to the end of enabling a sustainable, long-term, and constructive relationship with the OUSD, we offer that the Hillcrest LRPC continue to work with OUSD staff and supply them with information that may be helpful in establishing policies for Hillcrest and its neighboring schools.

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5 For information on AUSD’s proposed policy, see Appendix A. This recommendation should not be interpreted as an endorsement by the committee of using redirection as a standalone solution to overcrowding. The committee does not view redirection alone as being a principled solution to the problem of long-term overenrollment.

6 OUSD BP 0420.5, Philosophy, Goals, Objectives and Comprehensive Plans: School-Based Decision Making. “The Governing Board desires to improve student learning by giving decision-making opportunities to the people who are closest to the students.” [webportal.ousd.k12.ca.us/WebItem.aspx?WebItemID=23&TabID=30](http://webportal.ousd.k12.ca.us/WebItem.aspx?WebItemID=23&TabID=30)

7 For more information on the steady-state population model, see Appendix F, “Supply Subcommittee Enrollment Prediction Model.” For a general discussion of school population and alternate versions of the model, see Section V-B., Findings and Recommendations, Results of the Supply Subcommittee.